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Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I appreciate the strong and eloquent statement of my friend from Texas, his support for this legislation and over 100 of our colleagues on bipartisan legislation that seeks to make a difference, as my friend said. I would like to express my deep appreciation for Chairman Hyde's hard work and passion on this item that has helped us get to this point today.

This legislation may be coming up under suspension of the rules, but for over 2 billion people around the world without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, nothing could be more important for us to discuss here today. This is an opportunity for the House of Representatives to exert leadership on this too-often-overlooked, but critical, issue. Headlines today are devoted to the potential for a pandemic dealing with bird flu, and rightly so. But here and now, lack of access to water and sanitation is the number one killer around the world. We may take safe drinking water and sanitation for granted, but such is not the case for these hundreds of millions of people.

As my colleague said a moment ago, every 7 to 15 seconds, a child dies unnecessarily from waterborne disease. In the course of our brief discussion today, over 100 children will die unnecessarily. As a result of lack of access to safe drinking water, half the people in the world today who are sick, are sick unnecessarily because of this simple problem. This bill is an opportunity, not to create vast new programs and bet on new technology, but to refocus our foreign assistance efforts on a comprehensive, strategic series of investments. There are simple common-sense steps the world fully understands which will make a difference in people's lives, help transform their communities while building real local capacity for sustainable development.

Water and sanitation is crucial because it is a necessary part of every one of our foreign assistance objectives. Access to water empowers women and girls who in many places are unable to get an education or hold a job because they have to spend hours walking to fetch water for their families. They are at risk in many places of attack as they leave the village in search of safe water, and hours of dangerous toil means school is less likely or even impossible.

Safe water and sanitation makes people healthier and, therefore, more economically productive. Studies show at any given time the fact that half the people in the developing world being sick from water-related diseases, especially chronic diarrhea, saps their capacity to be economically productive.

We find that the economic benefits of investing in safe drinking water and sanitation is dramatic, up to \$34 in increased economic productivity for every dollar invested. Poor countries with access to improved water and sanitation have enjoyed annual growth rates in their gross domestic product of 3.7 percent, while those without adequate investment saw their GDP grow at just one-tenth of 1 percent, almost 40 times greater for those with the adequate investment.

Poor people are already investing vast sums of money on unsafe water and access to water that comes via trucks. Investing in real water delivery systems will actually free up money for poor people to invest in their basic needs. There are even opportunities for microenterprise. In this way, these water investments can work the same as microfinance and debt relief combined.

Increasing access to safe drinking water and sanitation helps protect the environment, and not just for poor people in developing countries. Improving sanitation helps keep raw sewage from flowing into rivers and water sources. Protecting these natural resources helps keep water supplies clean and people healthier all around the world.

Safe water projects can empower communities, supporting them on their way to self-sufficiency. It builds the capacity for communities to design, build and maintain not just their water and sanitation systems; it can provide an inclusive process to bring together their governments with their citizens, the components of civil society to develop the needs for democracy and good government.

As my friend alluded to, water can help prevent conflict and violence as, across the world, efforts to cooperate over shared water resources can serve as an incentive to limit conflict and a starting point for efforts to resolve conflict.

Finally, the Copenhagen Consensus group of economists, a group that, frankly, is skeptical of much foreign aid, rates the investments in water and sanitation as some of the best and most effective investments in development, growth, and ending poverty. This is not an investment that is going to end up in some thug's Swiss bank account. It puts local people to work while it saves their children's lives.

The scope and immediacy of this crisis in water and sanitation around the world was center stage when I and a number of my colleagues from the House attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. There, while we were debating water and its role in sustainability, we were able to visit some of the desperately poor instant slums that had sprung up around Johannesburg. We saw firsthand the need for water and sanitation being at the forefront of those people's needs and, again, examples of cost-effective mechanisms that made a difference. I think that was one of the reasons why the United States and 185 other countries committed to cutting in half the number of people in the world without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015.

The cost of meeting this goal is not an investment that is beyond our capacity. It is less than Europeans spend on perfume each year or that Americans spend on elective cosmetic surgery. In order to put it in perspective, it is less than the cost of one takeout pizza per American family per year that will enable us to transform people's lives. Unfortunately, despite our good work, despite the consensus in 2002, despite the growing awareness of this problem, the world is not yet on track to meet that goal.

The United States has not yet developed a comprehensive strategy to make that happen. It is not that we are unaware or that we are on the sidelines. We are spending a huge amount of money already, and the House just approved doubling our current investment in aid last week.

We have a wide variety of programs across the whole of the Federal Government. There are programs in the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Defense, Interior, State, the African Development Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Agency For International Development, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, Centers For Disease Control, the Export-Import Bank, the InterAmerican Foundation, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the Peace Corps, EPA, all have pieces of this puzzle. The problem is we have not brought them together in a comprehensive and thoughtful fashion. There is not enough coordination and strategic planning among the various programs.

Our current efforts are focused almost entirely on a very few places, most of the investment to be found in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza. I am not going to suggest at all that those investments are not worthwhile and important, but it is time that we refocus our efforts to make sure that we pay attention to areas of greatest need. For example, the lowest percentage of access to water and sanitation is in sub-Saharan Africa, and it gets only \$7 million a year. The largest number of people without this access are in South and East Asia.

This legislation helps us take these many programs, give them the coordination and direction they need to make a difference.

The Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act establishes improving affordable and equitable access to water and sanitation as a major objective of our foreign policy. It directs the Secretary of State to develop a strategy with specific timetables, benchmarks and goals to bring together this vast array of programs that I mentioned to integrate water and sanitation into our development efforts and to meet our commitment that the United States and over 180 other countries made in Johannesburg.

It will ensure that water and sanitation is focused on the places with the greatest need, including efforts on building developing world capacity so that they do not remain dependent on our assistance over time. And it sets policy to assure that our assistance is as cost effective as it can be. That is one of the elements that came forward in our hearings. In talking to faith-based and other nongovernmental organizations, we learn there are a vast array of cost-effective mechanisms that will make a difference and will do it quickly.

I would also note that this bill would establish one of the Millennium Development Goals in U.S. law for the first time. This would be regarded as a very positive development around the world. Our efforts in this legislation are designed to provide our government, recipient governments and all their private-sector and NGO partners with the necessary tools and flexibility to increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation in an affordable and equitable way. It is the result of a long process that has included input from Members on both sides of the aisle, from NGOs, from faith-based organizations, environmental groups, engineering firms, water-related businesses, from the administration.

I am pleased and proud that our committee has been inclusive and thoughtful in bringing this together. I think it has the potential not just in healing some of the poorest countries around the world, but I think it is an example of the bipartisan cooperation that Members here are

interested in.

As my colleague from Texas pointed out, this is a priority of Senate Majority Leader BILL FRIST. He has introduced legislation, along with the Democratic Leader HARRY REID. There is an opportunity here for the two Chambers to come together quickly to be able to put legislation on the President's desk before we adjourn this year, and it will have an impact that will be felt, as they say, around the world.

I have mentioned the support, leadership, and passion of our chairman, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Hyde). I appreciate ranking Democrat, the gentleman from California's (Mr. Lantos) advice and counsel to me as I have been developing this legislation and moving it forward.

There are key staff members here: Lara Alameh, who has spent countless hours for the majority working with the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Hyde), moving this legislation forward, and I appreciate her personal commitment and engagement; Robin Roizman from the gentleman from California's (Mr. Lantos) staff; my friend and colleague, Judah Ariel, who has made this a critical part of his role in our office. I appreciate the people behind the scenes who have worked hard to give us a piece of legislation that we can move forward with confidence and expedition.

Finally, I am pleased that the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Hyde) actually had the idea, I am sorry that I did not name this legislation after Senator Paul Simon. Senator Simon gave me a copy of his book "Tapped Out" on his last visit to Oregon, something that I cherish. And he was the type of bipartisan, thoughtful, results-oriented legislator that we all should want to emulate. This legislation will be a fitting memorial to his memory. I appreciate what has brought us to this day.

Mr. Speaker, I will submit in the RECORD an expanded list of the groups and organizations who have made the legislation possible, who have worked with the staff, who have worked to refine it, and who are raising the public awareness.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we have reached this point today. I am pleased that in the last week I think it is safe to say there has been more attention spent on Capitol Hill on providing safe drinking water for the poor than there has probably been in years. I think it is time well

spent. This legislation will move us in that direction, and I am pleased that we have it here before us today.